

***INTO THE WEB:***  
**HOW A SMALL PUBLISHER IN INDIA FOUND**  
**A PLACE ON THE INTERNET**

by

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### Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

Into the Web: How a Small Publisher in India

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Found a Place on the Internet

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## **Abstract**

Within the realm of publishing, digital communication in the form of the Internet is offering revolutionary opportunities. There are Web sites for an immeasurable range of subject matter from the daily news to online shopping to Brad the mechanical engineering grad's curriculum vitae. So who better to venture into this new form of publication than, well, publishers? The subject matter of this study analyses the entry of a small book publisher in India into the new area of Internet publishing. Kali for Women is a feminist press in New Delhi and also happens to be the first women's publishing house in South Asia. The author of this report travelled to New Delhi to establish a Web site for the company. Although the editors at Kali for Women had wanted to start a Web site for some time, the decision to create Kali's own place on the Internet meant the adoption of an entirely new publishing format with technology unfamiliar to those in the company.

While the initiative was successful, it was fraught with challenges and obstacles, a condition that accompanies the introduction of anything new. This study attempts to map Kali's technological trajectory, but first places the endeavour in the context of Indian publishing and Kali's formation and presence in that market. The goal is to understand how and why a small, "low-tech" publisher in New Delhi established a presence in the online global community. The research is based on readings in related subject matter, newspaper articles from Kali's archives, writings by Kali's founders, a sampling of other publishers' Web sites, and the author's own experience.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Within the realm of publishing, digital communication in the form of the Internet is offering revolutionary opportunities. These days anyone with a home computer and a little software can become a "publisher" by mounting a site on the World Wide Web. The cost is minimal compared to traditional formats, and the content can be corrected, updated or completely changed within minutes. Even more astounding is the potential reach of this medium; a Web site is available to whomever can indulge in one of the more than 15 million digitally-interfaced computers around the world.

This is the basis of the Information Age, where data providers can charge a formidable price for the intangible and lawyers dealing in intellectual property have the most promising practices. Digital communication is permeating our lives as the Internet and its online community expand. It is even changing the way we think and create. In *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte, a professor of media technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describes the way this evolution in the flow of information is taking place.

World trade has traditionally consisted of exchanging atoms....when you go through customs you declare your atoms, not your bits. Even digitally recorded music is distributed on plastic CDs, with huge packaging, shipping and inventory costs. This is changing rapidly. The methodical movement of most information in the form of books, magazines, newspapers and videocassettes, is about to become the instantaneous and inexpensive transfer of electronic data that move at the speed of light. In this form the information can become universally accessible.... The change from atoms to bits is irrevocable and unstoppable.<sup>1</sup>

Little wonder then, given the strong pull this phenomenon exerts, that millions of businesses, organizations and individuals are clamouring to make their contribution to the

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 4.



online world. There are Web sites for an immeasurable range of subject matter from the daily news (local, national and international) to online shopping to Brad the mechanical engineering grad's curriculum vitae. There is even a Web site for avid fans of the collection of air sickness bags.

So who better to venture into this new form of publishing than, well, publishers? Publishing companies of every size have made their first forays from ink squished onto the matted fibre of dead trees to a medium that consists mainly of electronic energy. Penguin International has a mammoth-sized site that covers Canada, the US, the UK and Australia. Meanwhile, Raincoast books in Vancouver, British Columbia is taking care of its corner of the world. And if just any old soul with a home computer can do it, and other publishers are also succeeding, then why not South Asia's first women's publishing house, Kali for Women?

The apparent simplicity of building a Web site for Kali for Women is deceptive. Although the small feminist publisher in New Delhi had been feeling the pull of that irrevocable and unstoppable change of atoms into bits for some time, the decision to create Kali's own place on the Internet meant the adoption of an entirely new publishing format with technology unfamiliar to those in the company. Then one day a Master of Publishing student from Canada inquired whether she could establish a Web site for the company in order to fulfill the requirements of her internship. In September 1998, hitherto known only through e-mail, the student showed up with a notebook computer and began the work.

While the initiative was successful, it was fraught with challenges and obstacles, a condition that comes with the introduction of anything new. This study attempts to map Kali's technological trajectory, but first places the endeavour in the context of Indian

**publishing and Kali's formation and presence in that market. The goal is to understand how and why a small, "low-tech" publisher in New Delhi established a presence in the online global community.**

## 2.0 Publishing in India

### 2.1 Mother India

To get even just a glimmer of the vibrant and prolific convulsion that is India's publishing industry, one must first attempt a comprehension, no matter how tenuous, of the country itself. First take a look at the geography. One country contains the world's greatest mountain range, wettest city, and longest beach. India consists of deserts, plains, plateaus, and jungles. The climate varies from tropical heat in the south to near-Arctic cold in the north. Gita Mehta, an Indian writer who also lives in New York and London, describes her country as:

...the sum of a million worlds enclosed by oceans on three sides, the mighty Himalayas on the north. Within these boundaries are voluptuous eastern cultures circled by paddy fields and western desert kingdoms locked in stone fortifications. Descendants of India's earliest inhabitants occupy the jungles sweeping through her heartland; three-thousand-year-old sacred cities still flourish on the banks of her immense rivers...<sup>2</sup>

Next consider the people who inhabit those various landscapes and ecosystems. According to the United Nations' 1998 estimates, 982,223,000 people are breathing, eating, and sleeping within India's borders. The figure is second only to China and according to the UN's projections, by the year 2050 India will have overtaken China as the most populous nation in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Stare at the underbelly of Asia and behold the Indian behemoth: 950 million people—one-sixth of the world's population—who live in a country one-third the size of the US, who speak more than a thousand languages and dialects, and who support more than 20 political parties in the world's biggest and perhaps boldest

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<sup>2</sup> Gita Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders: a view of modern India* (London: Minerva, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *United Nations 1998 Revision of World Population Estimates and Projections* (<http://www.popin.org/pop1998/default.htm#contents>), February 25, 1999.

experiment in democracy. Five decades after gaining independence from Britain, India still struggles to balance its political ideals with a populous that pulls this union in profoundly different directions.<sup>4</sup>

Those millions of people belong to at least 4,636 separate communities that belong to at least four distinct racial groups. They practise more than seven major religions, sometimes two or more at the same time. India has 25 states and seven union territories, each area containing its own unique culture. There are different languages, customs of dress, religious rituals, arts and crafts, and food.<sup>5</sup> Travel a distance of 100 kilometres, and you'll feel like you should visit the foreign exchange bureau. Continue another such distance, and you will notice just as dramatic a change. Himachal Pradesh in the north is as different from Kerala in the south as Finland is from Italy.

This diversity is understandable when considering India's antiquity. It is the site of one of the world's oldest civilizations, one centred in the Indus River valley in 2500 B.C. The Dravidians were forced south when the Aryans arrived in 1500 B.C., and since then different parts of India have been occupied or controlled by various powers, including the Moguls, various European states, and local nawabs and rajahs. The British assumed authority in 1857, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century increasing unrest led to Britain's withdrawal and independence for India in 1947.

It is perhaps the rule of these many different empires which contributes to the fabulous contrast of the country. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, said that India is like an "ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had

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<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey C. Ward, "India: Turning Fifty," *National Geographic*, vol. 191 no. 5 (May 1997): 9.

<sup>5</sup> Gitanjali Kolanad, *Culture Shock: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette, India* (Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 1997), p. 14.

been written previously."<sup>6</sup> Maybe that's why today you can take a casual drive through Delhi and see both modern glass-covered skyscrapers and 500-year-old sandstone tombs in practically the same neighbourhood. Maybe that's why you can see a painting of the Hindu god Krishna playing his flute while reclining in the back seat of a Rolls Royce. Maybe that's why you can stand on the terrace of a five star hotel's opulence and witness a sprawling slum directly below. Maybe that's why you can have a glass of wine for \$14 Canadian in that same hotel and a cup of tea for 12 cents just outside its gates.

India has a burgeoning middle class consisting of people who drive brand new cars; who obtain degrees in medicine, engineering and business; who eat at McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken; and who watch an "Indianized" version of the American television network, MTV. Foreign investment has poured into the country since sweeping economic reforms in 1991. Today 300 million Indians make more than US\$700 per year and 100 million have an annual income over US\$1400,<sup>7</sup> figures that afford enough disposable income for the purchase of consumer goods. In purely economic terms, the results are impressive with economic growth reaching 12.1% in 1996-97.<sup>8</sup>

But the benefits of this economic growth have yet to reach the majority of India's population. Three-quarters live in rural villages where there is little access to improvements in the quality of life, and those villages contain the largest concentration of poor people in the world—a figure of 320 million. The poverty in rural India has sent millions of villagers to the cities in search of income, only to drive the urban poverty rate up as well.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> David Collins, et al., *India* (Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1997), p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

About 90 per cent of Indians spent only two dollars a day in 1992, says the World Development Report 1998. Some 52 per cent spent even less—one dollar. Understandable, with a per capita national product of \$390 in 1997, compared to \$860 for China and \$2,470 for Russia. Understandable also when the richest, only a quarter of all Indians, manage to consume 43 per cent of all that is produced.<sup>9</sup>

The government estimates that 35 per cent of India's population is very poor, but the poverty line is set at a level that only affords the purchase of 2,435 calories per day—the equivalent of one square meal.

In her book *Culture Shock: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette, India*, Gitanjali Kolanad offers this advice to the foreigner who is trying to comprehend the contrasting and even conflicting images and experiences that her homeland offers:

As you slowly awaken to the complexities of just one place, you get the feeling that the longer you stay, the less you know. This is the beginning of the real awareness about India. Now you will be able to sift through the confusion of preconceptions and hasty generalisations and find more useful and accurate perceptions.<sup>10</sup>

Keeping that in mind, this study now humbly turns to a description of publishing in India.

## **2.2 Issues in Third World Publishing**

Relatively speaking, developing nations have come to publishing recently and to indigenous publishing even more recently. In *Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South*, Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, the founders of Kali for Women, cite colonization and empire as one of the reasons for this. The colonizers destroyed local systems of knowledge and put new ones in their place. Oral cultures, the predominant

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<sup>9</sup> Paromita Shastri, "Development can hurt..." *Outlook: the weekly newsmagazine*, vol. IV no. 41 (October 19, 1998): 78.

<sup>10</sup> Kolanad, p. 14.

form for the transfer of knowledge, were marginalized in favour of print. Once adopted, books became major instruments in education, but the colonization penetrated the field of knowledge once more. It took time to develop indigenous writers and books continued to be imported.<sup>11</sup>

Philip Altbach also describes the effect colonialism had on publishing in the South in *Publishing and Development in the Third World*. He says the colonial power determined the nature of the development of publishing as well as the modern educational system. For example, British firms entrenched themselves in their colonies and often dominated the most important market for books—the school textbook market. The colonizers also firmly integrated their language such that it came to be used in government, the legal system, commerce, and education. The dominance of the colonial language persists even after Independence, helped in many cases by a proliferation of local languages that makes the selection of one official language difficult. Movements to declare a dominant language *the* national tongue have even lead to civil unrest, as is the case with Hindi in India.

For example, there has been continuing opposition in India to using Hindi as the sole national language. English remains a key language for commerce, politics, and intellectual life—40 years after Independence close to half the books published in India are in English—and English almost completely dominates scholarly and scientific publishing and much of political analysis.<sup>12</sup>

Today the foreign firms, at least in general, no longer monopolize publishing and book sales, but they remain extremely powerful. In Altbach's view, they cannot be depended upon to meet local publishing needs. All the more reason to encourage

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<sup>11</sup> Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, *Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South* (Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Bellagio Publishing Network, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Philip G. Altbach, "Publishing in the Third World: Issues and Trends for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1992), p 5.

indigenous publishing, an industry which is vital to the very act of nation-building. This is particularly so in the Third World where more sophisticated technologies are in short supply.

Indigenous and autonomous publishing is especially important in the context of the Third World. Many Third World nations are in the process of modernizing or reinterpreting their cultures. The means of communicating these insights is of special importance. Developing countries are also creating new education systems and the curricula to be used in schools. Again, there must be an effective means of publishing the textbooks and other reading materials needed for educational systems. Markets for books are generally small. Populations are sometimes small, and rates of literacy are often low. Further, incomes may be limited, and there is frequently no tradition of purchasing books. In many Third World nations, a high proportion of the population lives in rural areas and has no access to books or other published material. There are, therefore, special needs to be met by publishers. The creation of a publishing industry under such unfavorable conditions presents a significant challenge.<sup>13</sup>

Another difficulty that Third World publishers face is access to the resources needed to establish publishing units. The raw materials may be present, but the infrastructure of production, factories, and machinery is not. Purchasing equipment and supplies from outside is prohibitive because of high costs and unfavourable exchange rates. Take paper as an example—most countries do not produce sufficient paper for book production and some do not produce paper at all. They have to import in a market dominated by industrialized nations as both producers and consumers, which means the Western countries set the prices.

Another basic problem exists when it comes to the question of resources. Much of the public doesn't have the option of purchasing books.

In several Third World countries while books are still among the most widely used of media, high rates of illiteracy make it difficult for publishing to survive. Shortages of money, and what are universally seen as more urgent needs such as

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 3.



food, water, and shelter, are also things to contend with. If people do not have a roof over their heads, how can you convince them to spend scarce resources on buying books?<sup>14</sup>

Not only is there a lack of money, but the largely rural populations do not have access to bookstores. Distribution presents a problem for all publishers, but in developing nations, it is especially difficult. The booksellers that do exist are often undercapitalized and do not have large stocks, the reason being it is difficult for them to get credit. Add to the equation the inherent problems of insufficient and inefficient means of transportation and you have what Altbach says could be the weakest link in Third World publishing.

Meanwhile, the door has been left open for the success of imports. In many cases there is more profit in importing and selling foreign books than in producing domestic titles. One of the reasons for this is the perception that foreign goods are superior, a hangover from colonial days. Even India, which has a very active indigenous industry, still imports large numbers of books from abroad, sometimes the subject matter of which is domestic issues. Western scholars have the funds and opportunities to do research in developing countries. The books are expensive and well-made and then carry a reinforced legitimacy of 'foreign' products. The problem is how to encourage indigenous publishing and discourage imports while not restricting the access to information. Part of the solution lies in first improving trade between nations of the South and sending more Third World books into Western markets, thereby reversing the flow of information.

Butalia and Menon discuss one more obstacle that exists within the Third World context of publishing. Several countries in the South are dealing with politically volatile and repressive situations. A fundamentalist backlash, especially in Muslim countries, is

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<sup>14</sup> Butalia and Menon, *Making a Difference*, p. 16.

squelching the right to publish, and the voices against such action, in particular independent publishers and their authors, are being silenced.

In countries such as Algeria the first people to have been the targets of attack have been intellectuals and writers—the wide swathe of killings and executions has not spared women. In Bangladesh, the now well-known writer Talisma Nasreen has had to flee the country for having spoken out. Nor has the backlash been limited to the Muslim world. In India it is becoming increasingly difficult to counter the fundamentalism of the majority community. In Mauritius writer Lindsey Collen has had to face the wrath of the Hindu community for her novel *The Rape of Sita*, which was published in 1993 and banned within three days of its publication.<sup>15</sup>

Altbach sees textbooks as one way to encourage domestic publishing in the Third World, where the provision of school and university textbooks is the largest single element of publishing. There is an immense need for textbooks as educational systems rapidly expand, and in this case, not only are publishers facing the challenge of printing and distribution, but of developing suitable books in a context where sometimes nothing at all exists. Government textbook publishing has often dominated the field because of a desire to keep prices low and a mistrust of the private sector. But that has taken the most financially predictable and often lucrative aspect of publishing from private companies, something they can use to subsidize other forms of publishing.

### **2.3 Publishing in Tongues**

The first book to come off a printing press in India wasn't in English. It wasn't in Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, or any other Indian language either. It wasn't even in Sanskrit. The first book printed in India was in Portuguese—the Catechism *Doctrina Christa* brought out by Christian missionaries in Goa in 1557. After that, presses appeared in Bombay in 1674, in Tranquebar (Madras) in 1712 and in Hoogly (Bengal) in 1778. There was some literary

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

and cultural publishing, but until the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century most of it was religious. English publishing emerged as the first serious venture into commercial activity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The educational system had been standardised by the colonial British government, and English became the official language of the government in 1844. As political ideas and science and technology poured in from the West, three universities were established in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, thereby creating an unprecedented need for books in English.<sup>16</sup>

The widespread use of English in India's education system was to become a contributing factor in the undoing of British rule. The 19<sup>th</sup> century brought with it an intellectual ferment that eventually led to the freedom movement and Independence. Revolutionary books by political leaders were published in English for the broadest network of distribution and understanding. In fact, many publishers were people of eminence who were themselves active participants in the freedom struggle. They succeeded in getting books of topical and political interest into the hands of educated Indians. Ideological commitment rather than profit was the driving force.

That was a work which required courage in those times when the repressive policies of the British Government were at their peak. These dedicated publishers were prosecuted, put behind bars and their printing presses were forfeited. They were charged with sedition for inciting a rebellion against the British sovereign. If ever a complete story of the suffering of those patriotic publishers comes to be written, it will be a great epic of courage and sacrifice. Indian publishers have always been keeping aloft the flag of 'Freedom to Publish'.<sup>17</sup>

Indian publishing thrived after Independence in 1947 as the demand for books exploded. Within four decades public expenditure on education increased more than ten-fold, the

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<sup>16</sup> Narendra Kumar, "English: the link language in India and abroad," *50 Years of Book Publishing in India since Independence*, ed. D.N. Malhotra (New Delhi: Federation of Indian Publishers, 1998), pp. 41-2.

<sup>17</sup> D.N. Malhotra, "A Giant in Slumbers: the great saga of Indian publishing," *50 Years of Book Publishing in India since Independence*, ed. D.N. Malhotra (New Delhi: Federation of Indian Publishers, 1998), p. 11.

number of educational institutions rose from 165,000 to 868,000, and the number of students increased from 15 million to 181 million.<sup>18</sup>

Today India is the largest book producing country among the developing nations and ranks as seventh in the world. Although the literacy rate is only 52.5 per cent (57.9 per cent for males and 30.6 per cent for females),<sup>19</sup> that is a dramatic increase over the years after Independence when it sat at 16.7 per cent (25.0 per cent for males and 7.9 per cent for females).<sup>20</sup> The high regard for both reading and the book itself is great. To deface a book—a container of knowledge and thought—is unthinkable. Gita Mehta developed a love of reading at a very early age.

In a country where illiteracy is so widespread, the capacity to read is treated with a respect bordering on awe, and maidservants who could neither read nor write made sure that we steered our way past the alphabet into those boring reader's primers that described English schoolchildren named Janet and John endlessly running or jumping. Their glee in our achievements increased as our reading improved and we were able to repay them for the stories we had learned while sitting on their laps—tales of gods and warrior kings and manipulative ascetics who had cheated their way into immortality—with stories from our books of sleeping beauties and frog princes and the extraordinary adventures of Tom Thumb. Because of them the world of the imagination was opened to us, becoming as tangible as the corporeal world, as tangible as the next book waiting to be read by torchlight under the covers when they sent us to bed. And the act of reading became a pleasure so intense that adults often treated it as a vice when they could not draw us from our books to eat or bathe.<sup>21</sup>

This love of books is manifest in each of India's constitutionally-recognized languages all 18 of them: Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Kashmiri, Dogri,

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<sup>18</sup> Kumar, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> Soma Wadwha, "Education," *Outlook: the weekly newsmagazine*, vol. IV no. 41 (October 19, 1998): 68.

<sup>20</sup> Tejeshwar Singh, "Publishing in the Third World: Learning Do's and Don'ts from India," *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1992), p. 264.

<sup>21</sup> Mehta, p. 166.

Konkani, and Sindhi. To reach an exact quantum presents a large problem though, mainly because not all publishers are aware of or fulfill their legal duty to send one copy of each publication to the National Library, and the government does not closely monitor the situation and apply penalties. The number registered for 1989 by the Library in Calcutta was 16,635 books in total, including 6,101 in English and 2,169 in Hindi. Most observers recommend adding 30 per cent to the figures for all languages except English where the figure should be increased by 20 per cent.<sup>22</sup> In 1998, the Federation of Indian Publishers tried to make publishers aware of their responsibility to submit books through a series of meetings around the country in various languages. The Federation also took the opportunity to attempt a more accurate survey of the number of books published in India. The result showed that 57,586 books in total were published in 1997, 12,528 in English and 16,026 in Hindi.<sup>23</sup>

If the Federation's numbers are to be taken as accurate, then they dispel a long-held belief that the largest number of books published in India are in English. That doesn't change, however, the sway that the English language holds over the Indian publishing scene. Spoken by only two per cent of the population, mainly in the large metropolises, English is a link language in most states and has served to cement international relations.

Although India attained political Independence in 1947, its colonial masters left many legacies behind including the English language. This legacy has been both harmful and beneficial to India in different spheres. In the field of publishing it has been advantageous. The Indian book industry owes a great deal to English as a trend-setter, a gap filler, a guide to editorial and production standards and a medium of international flow of knowledge and expansion of export markets. It is because of its publication in the English language that India today occupies a prominent place on the world map of book publishing and Indian books reach out to over 80 countries of the world.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, p. 262.

<sup>23</sup> Malhotra, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Kumar, p. 41.

English is the language of India's elite, an educated group that has the ability and the tradition of purchasing books. It is a publishing sector that has produced writers known the world over including R.K. Narayan, Vikram Seth, and most recently, Arundhati Roy. India is also the third largest producer of English books in the world after the United States and the United Kingdom.

The advantages that English has over other languages in publishing only reinforce themselves. English books have an average print run of 2000 because of the wider market. The lower print runs for Indian language publications mean that they have difficulty maintaining a high standard of production at a reasonable cost. This is further reflected in library intake, which is 75 per cent of the book trade in India. One-third of total purchases are in languages besides English and in terms of value, 85 per cent of library budgets are spent on English books.<sup>25</sup> The export market is also dominated by English language publications by 83 per cent.<sup>26</sup> The bulk of foreign sales are to Europe where English is easily understood or easy to translate.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## 3.0 A New Medium

### 3.1 What is the Internet?

The Internet is known as the network of networks—millions of computers around the world communicating with each other through a digital language and then translating that information for the human consumer. In *The History of the Internet*, Henry Edward Hardy offers this broader and more eloquent definition:

The Net is a unique creation of human intelligence. The Net is the first intelligent artificial organism. The Net represents the growth of a new society within the old. The Net represents a new model of governance. The Net represents a threat to civil liberties. The Net is the greatest free marketplace of ideas that ever existed.<sup>27</sup>

But where did this global network of interaction begin?

The idea started as a proposed solution to a US military problem during the Cold War: how could American authorities successfully communicate after a nuclear war? They needed a system that would link cities and military bases while withstanding the impact of atomic bombs. In 1964, the Rand Corporation, America's foremost think tank of the era, came up with a proposal for a network that would have no central authority and would be designed to function as a whole, even if some of the parts were destroyed. Each communications centre, or node, would be equal in status. They would pass along messages divided into "packets" of information, each separately addressed. A packet could wind its way through the system via any combination of nodes.

The particular route that the packet would take would be unimportant. Only final results would count. Basically, the packet would be tossed like a hot potato from node to node to node. If big pieces of the network had been blown away, that simply wouldn't matter; the packets would still stay airborne, lateralled wildly across the field by whatever nodes happened to survive.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Edward Hardy, *The History of the Internet* (<http://ftp.ocean.ic.net/pub/doc/nethist.html>), 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Sterling, *Short History of the Internet* (<http://www.forthnet.gr/isoc/short.history.of.internet>), 1993.

The communications system would be protected through a redundancy in connectivity.

The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) developed the proposal and the first ARPANET Information Message Processor was installed at UCLA on September 1, 1969 in minicomputers that had 12K of memory (considered powerful at the time). Additional nodes were soon added at Stanford Research Institute, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah. Scientists and researchers, especially those who worked in computer science, were supposed to use the system to share one another's computer facilities by long distance. In addition, however, the users warped the system into a "high-speed, federally subsidized electronic post office". The main traffic on ARPANET became news, personal messages, gossip and even schmoozing. Despite this, the nodes continued to multiply and by 1972, 37 institutions were online.<sup>29</sup> Group mailing lists developed and the first discussion group was born: SF-LOVERS for, not surprisingly, science fiction fans.

The decentralized nature of ARPANET fostered its expansion in the 1970s, particularly when Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) software was developed. This computer language was in the public domain and could be accessed and used by many different machines. Soon other fledgling networks like BITNET and USEnet joined ARPANET, including groups from other countries like Canada, Great Britain, France, Japan, Norway and Sweden. In 1983, the military section of ARPANET split to form MILNET and the remaining configuration became the Internet. At the same time, many different social groups started to own powerful computers and it was fairly easy for them to link to the growing network. Nodes had to be divvied up to establish a classification system: foreign countries by their geographical

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



locations; "gov" for government; "mil" for military; "edu" for education; "com" for commercial; "org" for non-profit organizations; and "net" for gateways between networks. Today there are more than 15 million "hosts" on the Internet. A host is a single machine that logs on and each computer must have at least one user, some have more than ten. Other numbers show that 15 to 20 per cent of users are women, the average age of users is 35, and a majority are students, faculty, researchers, or technical professionals.<sup>30</sup>

The Net's proponents are lauding the birth of a cultural revolution and claiming the Internet is a rare and modern anarchy that cannot be governed. In *Road Warriors: Dreams and Nightmares Along the Information Highway*, the authors call the Internet the most dynamic and wide-ranging interactive mass medium in history because users decide what they want to do and when they want to do it. The decentralized, non-hierarchical Internet is also promoting new modes of human interaction from behind a radiant screen over remote distances.

It may be true, as the now famous *New Yorker* cartoon put it, that "on the Internet, no one knows you're a dog". But in this dog-eat-dog world, in which life has become so fragmented, isolated, and rootless for so many of us, the electronic frontier has offered a new home of sorts for tens of thousands, perhaps even millions, of people. Deep and lasting friendships, even marriages, have been crafted out of the raw digital material of a Net connection....[T]he Net can offer companionship and belonging in "virtual communities" (whose spirit is often made flesh through subsequent get-togethers) that are as genuine and meaningful as any that exist in the real world.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2 The Internet in India

Leave it to India to produce the perfect synthesis between the old and the new.

Homeindia.com, voted "Most Useful Indian Website", is a bridge between ex-patriate

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Burstein and David Kline, *Road Warriors: Dreams and Nightmares Along the Information Highway* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1995), p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

Indians who have access to e-mail and their relatives and friends in India who don't. The e-mail enabled correspondents send their letters to Homeindia.com, and the company prints them out in Mumbai and sends them through the postal system. Instead of two weeks, a letter from the US takes three to four days to reach its destination. Forty percent of those letters are going to remote villages.<sup>32</sup> Another example of combining technology with tradition was created by Rediff on the Net, an Indian site that includes chat, e-mail, news, shopping and even free Web page hosting. For 1999's Holi, the Hindu celebration of colours and spring, Rediff in partnership with Close-Up toothpaste developed an electronic greeting card. An image of a tube of toothpaste squirting out various colours could be sent to friends and relatives all over the world.<sup>33</sup>

Although India is on its way to being the most populous nation in the world, its number of "netizens" is small. Until early in 1999, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (VSNL) was pretty much the only Internet service provider in India. They have approximately 150,000 subscribers and are struggling to meet the demand for new connections. VSNL's service is also unreliable—once a consumer gets past the busy signal, he or she never knows how much time it will be before the connection is broken. It is not uncommon to have to reconnect five times or more in the space of an hour. This makes logging on and staying on the Internet a frustrating process that discourages many.

VSNL's monopoly was broken on February 9, 1999 when Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) launched its Internet service for the public at a price 15 per cent lower than VSNL's. MTNL handed out 5,000 new connections within the first few weeks

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<sup>32</sup> Ashutosh Kumar Singh, "The World is my Web," *Outlook: the weekly newsmagazine*, vol. IV No. 46 (November 23, 1998): 54.

<sup>33</sup> Holi Hungama! (<http://www.rediff.com/holi99/hinfo.html>), March 1, 1999.

and projected 100,000 by the end of 1999.<sup>34</sup> The efficiency of the service remains to be seen and ironically, international connectivity is being provided to MTNL through VSNL. Both companies are dependent upon India's creaking, antiquated telephone network and the Net doesn't work if the phone doesn't. Another consideration is the number of people who have access to the means to connect. One in 556 people have personal computers; one in 112 people have a phone. Despite the challenges, Internet proponents are optimistic.

Radio took 38 years to reach 50 million people. Television took 13 years. The Internet has achieved that in just five years. By 2005, it will have a billion subscribers—India now has just 150,000, but that's expected to go up more than tenfold in two years. Electronic commerce or e-commerce—buying and selling via the Net—in India totalled only around Rs 12 crore in 1997, according to Ravi Sangai, president of market research firm IDC India—but could reach Rs 700 crore by 2001.<sup>35</sup>

Conditions are expected to improve as more private companies enter the fray. The government is introducing legislation to update the country's cyber laws, at present held hostage by the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885. The government also has two task forces: one to look at the national information infrastructure and one to deal with information technology as a whole. One enterprising net entrepreneur is taking his own action in the meantime; Rajesh Jain has a plan to make public phone booths into Internet kiosks with payment procedures. He is also planning to manufacture Web browsers in Hindi and other local languages.

The lack of reliable Internet service in the country hasn't stopped Indian Web sites from taking their rightful place on the Net. Most of their creators have avoided the problems by turning to service providers in countries abroad for hosting, especially the

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<sup>34</sup> Staff Reporter, "MTNL launches Internet services," *The Times of India*, New Delhi (Wednesday, February 10, 1999): 4.

<sup>35</sup> Kumar Singh, p. 56.

US. In January 1998 there were 7,175 Indian domain hosts; one year later there were 13,253.<sup>36</sup> A site called [www.indonet.com](http://www.indonet.com) is attempting to keep track of the Indian presence on the Internet. It contains a catalogue of sites registered in India under the domains assigned to the country; many more are registered under different designations, but this breakdown offers at least some insight. The largest category by far is ".ernet.in", which stands for education and research network. Most universities and research institutes carry this address and there are 92 sites in the category in all. Another 10 sites are registered under ".ac.in", a class reserved for the academy. Another large category is India's commercial designation; 37 sites are registered under ".co.in". Most of India's government sites, 21 in total, can be found in ".gov.in" and ".nic.in". The letters "nic" stand for National Informatics Centre Network. However, at least seven other government sites are scattered in different designations, including the Reserve Bank of India which has its site originating from a commercial designation—[www.reservebank.com](http://www.reservebank.com).<sup>37</sup>

### **3.3 The Internet in Publishing**

Drill down through the Yahoo! search engine (one the biggest and most used on the Web) to Home>Business and Economy>Companies>Publishing. There is a comprehensive list of publishers with Web sites on the Net, a total of 2799. The number spreads out across a broad range of topics, including 262 sites in education, 235 sites in religion and spirituality, and 157 sites in health. There are only 13 sites under romance.<sup>38</sup> Publishers have joined the rest of the world in using the Internet to communicate to the new global audience in a couple of different ways.

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<sup>36</sup> "The Internet in India," (<http://www.indonet.com/indiainternet.html>), March 1, 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "Yahoo! Search," (<http://dir.yahoo.com/Business and Economy/Companies/Publishing>), March 2, 1999.

There are some innovators who are using the World Wide Web to develop new forms in publishing. Take for example the birth of the "e-book", the full text of a published work on the World Wide Web. At first e-books were scattered throughout the Web and it was difficult to find a specific title. Books Online changed that by developing a search method for titles. A potential reader can enter the first letter of the title or do a keyword search; the results are presented in a hyperlinked list with the name of the site in the column beside. In the meantime, online publishers have increased their credibility.

An online book has been nominated for the Booker Prize. I didn't expect that sort of thing to start happening quite so soon. I was still of the opinion that online books were merely those which were not good enough to gain the attention of a traditional publisher. I admit it, I was wrong. I went back to all those e-publishers I had bookmarked so many months ago to have a second look. The first thing I noticed is that the vast majority of them had either vanished, or hadn't added a single thing since last year. The second thing I noticed was that those that were thriving (in terms of content, I can't speak for their finances) were looking more respectable, were not charging their authors for their 'publishing' efforts, and were offering their authors a respectable royalty.<sup>39</sup>

Online Originals published the e-book that was nominated for the Booker Prize, a work called *Angels of Russia*. A number of their other online titles have also received favourable reviews in the media. Each month one title is offered for free download so that consumers can test the quality of the literature. Their editorial policy holds that each title must be book-length, unpublished in any form, original in the sense that it expresses new ideas, and well-written and intelligent.

It must be mentioned that, just as in the print world, there are online vanity publishers who will take anyone's manuscript and publish it for a fee. But the number of legitimate online publishers, like Online Originals, is increasing. OverDrive Press requires

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<sup>39</sup> Wendy J. Butler, "Is Online Publishing Becoming Credible?" <http://publishing.miningco.com/library/weekly/>, February 24, 1999.

no money from authors and the royalty is calculated as a percentage of net revenues.

Titles can be purchased and downloaded from the online bookstore, BookAisle.

PreviewBooks from Oak Tree Publishing offers a unique method for sampling a title before purchasing. Readers can browse through the first half of a book, and if it appeals to them, pay a fee to download the second half. Royalties are paid to authors on the number of 'second halves' sold. Another prominent e-publisher is 1<sup>st</sup> books. They publish titles by authors who have already been published for no charge, but first time authors can be billed up to \$500. The author receives the full profit on the book until their costs are recovered and a 40 per cent royalty after that.

One of the largest e-titles that can be found on the Web today is one that comes from a company that published even before the Boston Massacre. The first edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica came out in 1768 and started a more than 200-year career as a respected household name. In 1995, the venerable reference set started its first experiments in a paperless version by making it available to only colleges and universities over the Web at a rate of one dollar per student per year. Today, the encyclopaedia is available to any online consumer for US\$5 per month. With more than 66,000 articles and 44 million words, Britannica Online is simple to use and easy to navigate. Every article has pointers to related articles and links to the rest of the Web. Cross-referencing was never easier—readers can go as far as they choose—and sound clips and videos accompany the simple combination of text and graphics. An entry on the pop musical group the Beatles includes an article with hyperlinks to related topics, like the American band the Monkees; a sampling of five different songs; and a mini movie of thousands of teenage fans greeting the Fab Four as they arrive in New York City on February 7, 1964.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "The British Invasion," *Britannica Online*, (<http://www.eb.com>), March 3, 1999.

The advantages over the print version are many. With Britannica Online, distribution is practically free and the consumer can pay in small sums rather than investing more than \$1000 in one go. No longer are articles restricted to the amount of space available in a particular volume, as dictated by the marketing department's pricing. If anything, Web publishing creates the opposite problem of deciding when to quit writing on a particular topic. Britannica's editors can update information as soon as it becomes inaccurate or new developments occur. Take as an example the case of a simple name change. When International Harvester changed its name to Navistar International Corporation in 1986, the print editors had to not only update the article, but move it to a different volume. Today that change could be made on the Web within one day. Britannica's shift has drastically changed the very nature of its business.

Joe Esposito, the president of Encyclopaedia Britannica, North America, believes that Britannica Online is the key to the company's future. "This is not just another format," he says. "In the longer term, digital media will fundamentally destabilize the way we do business. Usually, people talk about the revolution in digital media in terms of putting interactivity within the product itself. But the real revolution is in the market....Online, you become a direct marketer. You have no sales force. You have guys maintaining your server—guys who look strange and listen to funny music and run this little box holding everything you've ever published since square one."<sup>41</sup>

One person who has been busy revolutionizing the way the publishing industry conducts its business in another manner is Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com. The online bookseller opened his cyber store in July 1995; the first title sold was *Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: Computer Models of the Fundamental Mechanisms of Thought* by Douglas Hofstadter. At year end Amazon.com had net sales of US\$511,000, and by the end of the third quarter in 1998, that figure was \$360 million. Today Bezos's

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Rossney, "Encyclopaedia Britannica Online?" *Wired*, 3.08 Online Archive (August 1995).

shares in the company are worth US\$9.1 billion. Amazon.com now offers CDs, videos, DVDs and games in addition to books for a total of 4.7 million titles, and Bezos wants to expand into other areas of sales via the Web.<sup>42</sup> Customers can search for specific titles or look for titles on a particular topic. They can also contribute their own reviews and read those written by others by posting them to a bulletin board. Amazon.com will even try to locate out of print publications and give an estimate of when it can deliver them. In the wake of Amazon.com's success, competitors have risen to the challenge. Amazon.com's main rival on the Web is the ordering site of the US mega-chain, Barnes and Noble.

The new merchant, [Bezos] suggests, volubly and unstoppably, is a community builder, a facilitator, a networker. He cites Amazon.com's willingness to post negative book reviews as an example of harnessing the antimanipulative truths the Internet allows consumers to root out. The Net's famously decentralized, open flow of information, he goes on, inevitably deflates the most extravagant hype of traditional retailing. And that shifts the balance of power—which since the origins of department stores and mass merchandising has favored the merchant—back into the hands of consumers. Amazon.com's scheme is, in effect, to form a strategic alliance with all that newly unleashed power.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of publishers who are on the Web have not innovated such radical changes, but have adopted the same use as most businesses—online marketing. If you type [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com), you arrive at a page that points to sites for Penguin publishers in four different countries: the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. Each sub-site is managed by the individual branch offices. Click on the link to Penguin Books Australia, for example, and you have access to author information, events, competitions, the latest releases, and a catalogue of over 8,000 items. The catalogue can be searched with a mini search engine that locates titles based on keywords. Random House has a similar format for its site at [www.randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com). It includes a searchable catalogue, graphic ads for

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<sup>42</sup> Chip Bayers, "The Inner Bezos," *Wired*, 7.08 (March 1999): 117.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.



new releases, a word-of-the-day column and a crossword puzzle. It's not just the big guys, either, who are accessing Internet marketing. There are more than 100 sites for small literary presses, including Cyclops Press, an independent, artist-run, publishing project in Winnipeg. The Cyclops site features information about current titles, samples of new fiction and poetry, and audio and video clips. There is no need for the searchable catalogue because its database is not large enough to warrant it.

One of today's cyber gurus is predicting that all this electronic activity in the publishing industry could lead to the demise of the publisher all together. Nicholas Negroponte, writing in his column in *Wired* magazine, calls online selling a process of "disintermediation" where middlemen and wholesalers are cut out of the chain. He points to Virtual Vineyards, one of the first Web sites to sell anything, let alone wine. Brothers-in-law Robert Olson and Peter Granoff run a no-inventory business by arranging to drop-ship wine directly to your home, while collecting a nominal fee for arranging the sale and handling the billing. Negroponte foresees a day when the vineyards themselves will set up their own Web sites and deal directly with the consumer. He goes on to say that the people who should really be disintermediated are publishers.

Since books are physical things distributed largely through thousands of retail outlets that buy one or two copies at a time, you and I would have trouble distributing as well as Knopf. Otherwise, we really can do without them. But tilt. People will say, "I bought your book because Knopf published it." Knopf was the talent scout, the finishing school, the company whose judgment is trusted. Well, rubbish to that. Think of the last three books you've read. Do you remember the publisher? You know the author and the title, as well as the book's color, shape, and thickness. But you're not likely to recall which company published it. Whether you read Grisham or Goethe, you read the author, not the publisher. That's why traditional book publishers will slowly but inevitably disappear. Bookstores will vanish even sooner, as they bring almost no value over a Web site like Amazon.com.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Negroponte, "Reintermediated," *Wired*, 5.09 Online Archive (September 1997).

Things are changing so quickly and drastically in the online world, that Negroponte's predictions could be realized. But it doesn't appear that he has known the love of a good editor, or the value that the editing process brings to a book. He is also overlooking publishers' ability to adapt as the nature of their industry changes.

## 4.0 A History of Kali for Women

### 4.1 A New Publishing Niche

Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon knew they were treading into unexplored territory when they started making plans to establish South Asia's first feminist publishing house in the early 1980s. The words "feminist" and "publishing" were unheard of together. Most people looked baffled at the suggestion and asked what it meant. If Butalia and Menon were able to explain, they were immediately told that there was no "market" for it.

When Urvashi Butalia and I set up Kali in 1984, friends in the trade cautioned us that "women's writing" was just a flash in the pan, not something one could build a publisher's list on. You'll never find enough good stuff to publish, they said, women don't write that much. Diversify, they said to us, don't focus on a "narrow" category, have something else to fall back on. To us, on the other hand, it seemed that developing a list that had half the human race as its subject could hardly be called "narrow". Moreover, so much research and writing on women was now being done that it was unlikely it would dry up in a hurry. So, we decided to go ahead, and our friends said, "Rather you take the risk than us, but we'll support you in whatever way we can."<sup>45</sup>

But by the early 1990s, every major academic publisher in India had a "gender studies" list and questions about viability had disappeared. Sage, Orient Longman, Oxford University Press, Tulka, Samya, Popular Prakashan, Stree, and Ajanta are all names in scholarly and academic writing who have adopted a "women's" list. Penguin, Rupa, and Thema are trade publishers who publish fiction and general non-fiction in the broad category of women's writing.

Part of the challenge Butalia and Menon faced at the beginning was clarifying the definition of feminist publishing and women's writing. They say that broadly speaking, it

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<sup>45</sup> Ritu Menon, "Feminist Publishing," *50 Years of Book Publishing in India since Independence*, ed. D.N. Malhotra (New Delhi: Federation of Indian Publishers, 1998), p. 230.

refers to an analysis or presentation that has women as its subject and uses gender as an analytical category. Relations between the sexes are seen as a social, political, and economic phenomenon rather than just biological. Feminist writing evaluates these relations in the context of patriarchy as a system that controls them. Issues can be economic liberalisation, globalisation, militarisation, violence, politics, health, education, the environment, law, literature, history, or the arts. Feminist writing can be done by and consumed by both men and women, but the market is mainly women, just as most law books are read by lawyers and most medical books by those working in health care.

In practically every sense of the word women's publishing is a "developmental" activity—developing material, developing awareness, skills, writers and markets, and not least, developing a readership. Women write in the face of tremendous odds, sometimes under direct threat to their lives. Many are in self-imposed exile in different parts of the world because they refuse to be silenced; others are censored, either by their states—or by men and society. In countries where theocracies or regimes of the ultra right are in power, women may find they can only publish outside their own countries, and women publishers may exercise a form of self-censorship. In some countries, because of war or economic crisis or ethnic conflict, it has been difficult to lay a sound foundation for a publishing infrastructure.<sup>46</sup>

Feminist publishing in India has come directly out of involvement with the women's movement and activism, often as a response to an immediate need for written material on women. Menon says that the production of books, pamphlets, research papers, and theoretical work has generally followed, rather than anticipated, the demand from activists, academicians, media women, and women writers.

Today feminist works can be found in several categories: academic (social sciences and history); general interest non-fiction (women and media, women and technology); biography, memoirs, diaries and letters; fiction; handbooks, primers and legal aid; non-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-4.

sexist children's books; and literacy and post-literacy materials. An important development in India came when women's studies started to become accepted as a legitimate academic pursuit. There is still no degree, undergraduate or post-graduate, being offered in women's studies nor a discipline by that name in any college, nor is there a syllabus and course material as of yet. However, there are women's studies centres in some universities and some departments have introduced papers on it in different disciplines. There have also been Master of Philosophy and Ph.D degrees awarded that have women's studies as their focus. Feminist writing is also rapidly growing in the area of development writing, including research in health, education, employment, political participation, poverty, and the environment.

Despite the successes, there are still many constraints and challenges to overcome in women's publishing. Philip Altbach summarizes their essence in the preface to *Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South*, a book written by Butalia and Menon.

Women's publishing faces many challenges in developing countries. If the publishing industry in general lacks capital, trained personnel, and effective ways of marketing books, women's publishing is doubly disadvantaged. As Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon show, there are important examples throughout the South of effective women's and feminist publishing efforts. The problems are daunting, but there is a strong commitment by women who are involved in social movements and who see the contribution that books can make. As in the industrialized world, women's publishers tend to be small and under-capitalized. They are sometimes overtaken by larger publishers who see the market potential for books by and about women. Yet, women's publishers are pioneers and bring energy and ideas to book publishing and development.<sup>47</sup>

One of the biggest problems is the lack of a local market that can support a diverse publishing industry. Women do not have high purchasing power and the literacy rate is low, 30.6 per cent for females.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, local publishers face stiff competition from

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<sup>47</sup> Butalia and Menon, *Making a Difference*, p. vii.

<sup>48</sup> Wadwha, p. 68.

western multinationals who can produce higher quality materials for the section of the market that does have money to spend. Another problem is that in India 80 per cent of book sales are made by libraries—a group of buyers that has conservative tastes and is less likely to purchase titles from the alternative stream. Feminist publishers also face the same challenges as mainstream publishers in India: a multiplicity of languages, literatures, and reading habits. Because of this, marketing and selling women's books requires careful negotiation of the fractionated Indian market in order to ensure positioning and visibility. A general interest English language book that sells up to 5,000 copies is considered a "bestseller" in a country that has a middle class of 250,000,000 with disposable income.

## 4.2 A New Publishing House

The letter from Ritu Menon came to Urvashi Butalia while she was still working in London in 1983: "Dear Urvashi, Remember me, Ritu? I've been hearing about this thing called Kali. And it sounds exciting...are you looking for someone to join up?" The inquiry reminded Butalia of an old dream that she didn't think would ever come true.

So many things begin in dreams....I had a dream about starting Kali. It stayed with me for many years. Somewhere along the way, inconveniently, I fell in love. Forget Kali, I thought, it'll never happen anyway, perhaps I should get married. But somehow, the dream stayed, curled up in a corner, biding its time. The marriage never happened. A bad bout of heartache followed. But alongside it, a small, nagging, soaring, occasionally bubbling voice kept saying: "now you can do it! Now there's nothing to stop you." And indeed there wasn't. Except doubt, confusion, fear—would it ever happen? *Could* it ever happen? A dream is one thing—and by now the dream had a name, Kali—but reality is a different story altogether.<sup>49</sup>

Butalia and Menon began a furious exchange of letters sharing ideas, strategies, and

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<sup>49</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "Lessons and Change," *Taking Stock: Harvesting the Fruits*, ISIS International Journal (1996).

contacts. A few months later they met in Delhi and everything seemed to fall into place. They invoked the name of Goddess Kali for the new company—Kali is the goddess of power and the only female deity without a consort. Cobbling together a meagre sum of 1,000 rupees (\$400 Canadian) to set up the organization, they moved into Menon's garage and "got on with the job".

Although funds were lacking, Butalia and Menon brought 20 years of experience in publishing to the new company and extensive academic backgrounds. Butalia, armed with a Master of Arts in English from Miranda House in Delhi, took her first freelance assignment in publishing at the Oxford University Press in 1972. She eventually was hired into a full-time editorial job with Oxford for six years and even gave them an undertaking that she would not marry for five years. At the same time she became involved with the women's movement and noticed there was hardly any writing with a gender perspective on feminist concerns and issues. To her the need for a publishing house sympathetic to the women's movement and its ideology was clear. But before acting upon her observation, Butalia worked for two years at Zed Press in London which further inspired her to establish her own small press.

Menon earned a Masters in American Literature from Vassar in Boston and got a job at Doubleday. She read Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, which acted as a catalyst in terms of recognising the power of the print media in raising awareness and challenging perspectives. When she married A.G. Krishna Menon, an architect, she moved back to India and worked with Orient and Longman and then obtained a longer stint with Vikas Publishers where she became chief editor in 1983. Like Butalia, she came to the conclusion that women's writing needed a sharper focus and involvement.

1984. Orwellian year. What better time to start a women's press? We had no money, no place to work out of, no big daddy supporting us. But we had lots of ideas, many friends in the book trade, authors who were willing to write for us and, between us, twenty years in publishing. Our friends in the business said: "Women's publishing? Women's studies? It's just a flash in the pan. Won't last. Best of luck, but rather you than us. So we rushed in where angels feared to tread."<sup>50</sup>

Butalia and Menon decided to establish a non-profit trust, basically because neither of them had sufficient funds to contribute and they required considerable capital. They recruited others to sit as trustees, but Butalia and Menon would remain directly responsible for Kali for Women as working trustees. They didn't want to be in the position where they could be fired by the board. This form of organization allowed them to apply for grants from international agencies, for specific activities, and to claim tax exemption as a charitable society. It also put some constraints on them such as regular reporting to the government on grant utilisation and a ceiling on honoraria that they could take as trustees.

In June 1984, a group of publishers in England organized the First International Feminist Book Fair in London. Butalia and Menon were given a stall, one ticket, and some other money which they used to eat bread and cheese. All they had with them were some red and black Kali folders emblazoned with their brand new logo, two or three ideas for books, and a lot of commitment. They "talked" their way through the fair, got to know people, made contacts, and tried to sell their "non-existent" books. They returned to India confident, inspired, and full of new ideas.

Butalia and Menon set out two objectives for the business: 1) they would seek only project funding rather than organisational support and 2) they would be self-

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<sup>50</sup> Ritu Menon, "A Wonderful Decade," *Taking Stock: Harvesting the Fruits*, ISIS International Journal (1996).



supporting within five years. They did not want to face a scenario where due to a lack of money they would have to change their priorities. In order to generate extra money in the beginning, Butalia and Menon offered their editing and production skills to other organisations and put the fees they earned back into Kali. Driving Butalia and Menon was a clear purpose as articulated in their mission statement:

Kali for Women, India's first women's publishing house, is concerned primarily with publishing Third World studies on women. Set up in 1984 as a Trust, its objective is to increase the body of knowledge on women in the Third World, to give voice to such knowledge as already exists, and to provide a forum for women writers, creative and academic. It has initiated various programmes aimed at producing reasonably priced published material in the social sciences and humanities, general non-fiction, fiction, pamphlets and monographs.

Kali's mission statement attempted to reflect a political perspective as well as the concerns of the women's movement and to carry forward and contribute to feminism's ongoing debates. Butalia and Menon saw their role as ideologically grounded in the sense that through the act of selection, publication and dissemination, they were both active participants and mediators in the region's feminist discourse. An important aspect of this, as publishers in the South, was to reverse the flow of information that takes place from the North to the South so that Third World voices could be heard in the West for a change.

Butalia says getting grants for a small women's press in 1984 was easier than it is today, especially since it was the year before the United Nations End of the Decade Conference on Women in Nairobi. Kali started with two projects: a book on women and media in Asia and one on the women's movement in India. They received a grant from NORAD for each and by 1985 Kali's first official book was published. The second and third titles came in 1986. For a few years after that, Butalia and Menon put out five to six

books per year. The titles were evenly distributed between women's studies, general interest non-fiction, fiction, biographies and memoirs, and a range of primers, handbooks and monographs for activists.

Another priority for the two women was to take work written in India's local languages and translate it into English. The purpose was to give exposure to women writers whose work was bound by the small geographical scope of individual languages, the assumption being that writers in English had other outlets, although Kali soon branched out to include original works in English. English, although spoken by only two per cent of the population, was chosen as Kali's main language of publication because it meant making Kali books available across the widest distances in the country, as English is a link language for all local languages. In addition, all higher education in India is in English and consequently, most academic research and writing is done in it. Publishing in English also makes the books easier to market for international rights sales because of ease of translation and the widespread use of English around the world.

As Kali's success strengthened through the early years, Butalia and Menon decided to try some titles in languages besides English. They published a few books in Hindi, which is spoken by approximately 60 per cent of India's population. Their experience here was somewhat disappointing, however, one reason being that books in Hindi require completely different marketing. Butalia and Menon have also made all of their material available for translation and publication into other Indian languages—free of cost.

In Kali's first years of publishing, 70 to 80 per cent of their titles were commissioned and that translates into a lot of time and energy. Commissioning books means working very closely with authors or editors from the beginning and continuing to

develop the title right through to the end. In some cases, Butalia and Menon had to argue very strongly in order to win some of their writers over—not because other publishers were in the bidding, but because some of their prospective authors had never even considered writing a book.

This is what happened with Vandana Shiva and her book, *Staying Alive*, which we published in 1988. I remember, it was 1985, just before Nairobi, and Vandana was telling me about a panel discussion she was going to be part of with Kenyan activist, Wangari Maathai. I said, "Why don't you do a book on women and the environment from the perspective of women in the South," and she replied, "I'm not a writer, I'm an activist—I can't write a book!" So I said, "Well, but writing is a subversive activity too, you know,"—and she agreed! That's probably been our best-selling book so far. It's in its fifth edition in India, has had multiple editions in the UK and US, and been translated into at least six other languages. And of course Vandana, who said she wasn't a writer, has written a book a year since then!<sup>51</sup>

Today, roughly 50 per cent of Kali's titles are still commissioned. Butalia and Menon get their ideas by keeping abreast of developments in academia and within the women's movement to see what issues are of current interest and importance. They also look at unsolicited manuscripts, but a very small portion of those are accepted. Often if Kali is interested in the manuscript, it means asking the author to do considerable work on it and that is not always acceptable to the writer. Kali does buy rights from publishers outside India but in a very limited way—one or a maximum of two titles per year.

There is no fixed criteria for what qualifies as a Kali title. The book has to be well written and accessible. It must be gender-focussed and contain information or ideas that Butalia and Menon feel are important and sellable. Ideally, the authors are willing to sign over world rights to Kali, but that is not always the case. That being said, Butalia and Menon have a clearer idea of what they wouldn't publish, namely "Mills and Boon

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<sup>51</sup> Menon, "A Wonderful Decade."

romances, or let us say a book extolling the 'virtues' (such as they are) of right wing women, and so on."<sup>52</sup>

### 4.3 Kali's Structure and Operations

There have been scores of changes at Kali for Women over the last 15 years in business, including the company's address. No longer residing in Menon's garage, Kali makes its home in a spacious flat in the posh New Delhi neighbourhood of Hauz Khas. The phones never stop ringing—both lines—and the fax machine pours forth a steady stream of its form of communication. Meanwhile, the e-mail has to be checked a couple of times a day for the correspondence that comes from all over India and the world. Butalia and Menon are both extremely busy and put in hours at the office six days out of seven in the week in addition to working at home. The meetings with authors, freelance editors, graphic designers, printers, distributors, advertisers, other publishers, and publishing hopefuls are seemingly endless. This hectic schedule is accompanied with a hefty amount of travel. Today the work of Kali takes Butalia and Menon all over India, Asia, and Europe on a regular basis.

Kali currently has five full-time and two part-time employees. Their functions are as follows:

- Bhim Singh - *peon* - post, deliveries, servicing orders, tea, coffee, general cleaning of office, purchasing supplies, and various odd jobs
- Satish K. Sharma - *office manager* - accounts, stock control, invoicing, exports, sales statements, collections, etc.
- Gulshan - *part-time accountant* - detailed accounting, preparation of accounts and other statements for audit purposes

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<sup>52</sup> Urvashi Butalia in a questionnaire response to the author (February 8, 1999).

- Elsy Paul - *administrative assistant* - filing, correspondence, telephone, cash sales, servicing orders, typing, etc.
- Jaya Banerji - *part-time editor* - commissioning manuscripts, reading unsolicited manuscripts, editorial and production work, overseeing design and production, liaising with authors, marketing and promotion
- Ritu Menon - *editor and various other functions* - commissioning manuscripts, reading unsolicited manuscripts, editorial and production work, overseeing design and production, liaising with authors, marketing and promotion, selling rights, international marketing, seeing to the day-to-day running of the office
- Urvashi Butalia - *editor and various other functions* - commissioning manuscripts, reading unsolicited manuscripts, editorial and production work, overseeing design and production, liaising with authors, marketing and promotion, selling rights, international marketing, seeing to the day-to-day running of the office

Kali's output today is usually around 12 new titles per year and perhaps three or four reprints. The average print run ranges from between 500 copies of a new hardcover (sometimes this is 1,000) to 2,000 copies for paperback. Butalia and Menon prefer to print in smaller quantities because they do not have a great deal of warehouse space and they do not like to tie their money up in the form of too many unsold books. They prefer to reprint as demand warrants. Kali tends to break even on most of its titles and to make a profit on quite a few of them. They have not kept an exact record, but Butalia estimates that about half the titles make some profit, albeit in modest sums. Until now, there have only been two titles that have lost money.

Butalia and Menon are also very active in international rights sales—more so than most Indian publishers, according to Butalia. They pursue rights sales in as many places as possible and over the years have had reasonable success. Kali books have appeared in the UK, US, Europe, and more recently, Pakistan. In some years, international rights sales

have brought in 50 per cent of Kali's income.<sup>53</sup> Kali collaborates with a range of publishers overseas—university, trade, alternative, and feminist—depending on the title and where it is to be published. The usual arrangement is that a local publisher agrees to publish and sell a book in a defined market after payment of a mutually agreed upon sum of money as royalty to Kali or the author. Kali's international rights sales are an essential component to the company's publishing philosophy to reverse the flow of information from North to South and present a perspective that is shaped by the experience of those from the Third World.

Kali is self-sufficient today and has been for several years. In the early days, they needed grants to survive. Now they generate enough income to cover their costs, publish the books they need to do, and still have a modest amount left over. However, when they have a large project which requires a major injection of capital, they do look for funds. At the moment, for example, they have two books that are funded: one is an atlas of the women and men of India and the other is a three volume series called *Idioms of Silence*, a major archival work on women singers, performers, and artists. Both of these titles would have been very difficult to do without extra money.

Kali still operates as a trust fund, which means that any profits have to be re-invested in the business. Butalia and Menon continue to receive a fixed honorarium, no matter how well the company is doing. Butalia believes that has enabled them to remain true to their politics and produce projects that can be commercially marketed. If Kali was run purely on business lines, they may have been tempted to adjust their priorities towards cash flow and profit as Kali's success grew.

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<sup>53</sup> Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, "Feminist Publishing: An Experience in Sustainability," *Voices for Change*, vol. 1 no. 2 (1997).

The trust does present some problems in the management of Kali, however. That form of organization basically means that the company is not owned by any one in particular. It is a board of people, the trustees, who are advisers, and Butalia and Menon who, as executive trustees, do all the work. The company's decisions are made mainly by the two of them after discussion, although there have been instances where one of them has made a decision independently because she felt sure the other would not object. Sometimes for the other office employees, it is difficult to figure out who is the "boss"—many people are used to working with one boss. Also, because Butalia and Menon handle similar work, it is difficult to know who is responsible for what. At the beginning, they agreed that each person would initiate her manuscripts and follow them all the way through to the end, from editorial, through production, to marketing and sales. While this makes it possible for authors to always have one editor who can answer all their queries, it does create some confusion about roles within Kali.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4.4 Kali's Marketing and Distribution**

Butalia and Menon say that marketing is the weakest part of their enterprise. They produce a catalogue and send out press releases and review copies, which does generate a fair amount of review space in newspapers and magazines. They also do some advertising, but only occasionally, and that is the sum of Kali's marketing activities.

Our books basically sell themselves: people know about them, Kali has a sort of reputation, so many buyers go into book shops and ask for Kali books and that is how we actually manage to sell. We need to put much more effort into marketing and chasing up orders. I am confident that if we are able to do this, we can easily double our sales.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Urvashi Butalia in a questionnaire response to the author (February 8, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Kali distributes its titles through the normal distribution channels: distributors in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and through retail outlets, either directly or via the distributors. In addition, they distribute through a network of NGOs and women's groups who are interested in Kali titles and who help to sell them. Butalia and Menon attend seminars, discussions, book fairs, and take their books everywhere with them. They also have a mailing list which "used to be very good at one time, but now needs updating and improvement, but we have not had the time to do this".<sup>56</sup>

In general, the trade takes care of the institutional supply—universities, libraries, government departments—and retail outlets like bookshops in towns and cities across the country. Kali's networking within the activist sector has proved invaluable for reaching NGOs, women's organisations, the concerned and individual reader, and other groups and individuals throughout South Asia. Direct mail is used for those who may not have access to either trade or alternative channels and buyers interested in specific titles which may be unavailable in local bookshops.

Butalia and Menon are not satisfied with their distribution in India, especially in the eastern and western regions. Menon feels that "no single distributor can do justice to our list because it is diversified".<sup>57</sup> One option was to establish an arrangement with a big publishing house with a good network, but they decided against it because of Kali's strong activist connections. In Butalia's opinion "it would have taken us from what is happening at the ground level".<sup>58</sup> The crux of the matter is that there is no way for a publisher—particularly an alternative one—to bypass trade channels, the distribution and marketing network used by the mainstream publishing industry. There does not exist an effective

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Akshaya Mukul, "When women steal a march," *The Pioneer* (Thursday, June 19, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



alternative system and to establish one would be a very costly enterprise. Distribution is a full-time professional activity that requires a knowledge of the market.

#### **4.5 Kali's Activism**

Kali's activism through the act of publishing is best illustrated with a concrete example. Several years ago, a group of women from the North Indian state of Rajasthan approached Kali with a book called *Shareer ki Jaankari*, which means "know your body" or "knowledge of your body". The women were part of a larger project called the Women's Development Programme, and through a series of health workshops, village women and activists from Rajasthan and Delhi had begun to explore the area of women's health, and particularly of women's bodies. At the end of the workshops, about 100 women got together to 'produce' (make by hand) two or three copies of a book that contained information about sex, menstruation, gynecological problems, child birth, domestic abuse, and other women's health issues. This was knowledge they felt was needed by them and therefore other women too, especially rural women.

In the initial stages, the book carried illustrations of naked women with different parts of their bodies marked. This was not well received in the villages where the first copies were tested. The reaction was that the illustrations were "unrealistic" because women in the village (and men for that matter) were never naked. So the women went back to the drawing board and came up with an innovative solution. They drew pictures of women and men fully dressed as they would be in north Indian villages, but they included flaps in strategic places so they could be lifted and the shape and structure of the body could be seen underneath.

The women approached Kali with the title because the programme authorities refused to reproduce the book. Despite the flaps, they found it "pornographic". Butalia and Menon thought the book was wonderful—the women had worked out creative and unique ways of communicating the information. There was a small amount of text in Hindi, for those who could read, but the book could also be entirely understood through the pictures only. Kali agreed to take on the book.

The important thing about such a book was that it had to be priced very low in order that it could become accessible to its target readership—village women. For most mainstream publishers this would not have been a viable proposition. The feminist publishing house Kali, however, took on the task of producing this book. The most complicated—and potentially expensive—part of the book was the binding. But since most binding in India is done by hand, it was eventually possible to get the book bound, flaps and all, quite cheaply (and interestingly by a group of women binders who had been trained in binding as an income generating activity).<sup>59</sup>

Initially, Kali printed 2,000 copies, but even before they had finished the printing, the village women (75 of whom have their names in the book as authors and copyright holders) had pre-sold these copies. Since then, the book has been reprinted many times and has been translated into several Indian languages. Interestingly, not one single copy has sold through a bookshop; all the sales have been through the informal network of activists.

Kali's publishing programme is "activist" in the sense that it is very important to them to do the above kind of book and they are more than ready to subsidise these kinds of titles with money earned from other works. Kali has produced legal aid handbooks, primers on domestic violence in both English and Hindi, and a monograph on property rights, just to mention a few of their feminist resource materials. Butalia and Menon make

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<sup>59</sup> Butali and Menon, *Making a Difference*, pp. 19-20.

Kali activist in other ways too by taking part in campaigns and other activities organised by women's groups. Kali has been a signatory to several petitions filed on behalf of women in the Supreme Court of India. It helps groups reproduce posters and literature for various campaigns, and Kali's staff members join in marches and demonstrations, although as Butalia says, their small numbers do not swell any ranks. Surprisingly, Kali has never been the target of any retributions for its feminist publishing and activities. Menon attributes this to luck and to the relatively small presence that Kali has in India's publishing scene.

Butalia says that while Kali's mandate hasn't changed over the years, it has certainly developed and grown. As new areas come up, Butalia and Menon strive to respond to them, and they are planning to expand the publishing programme and take it in one or two new directions. For a long time, they have wanted to do books for children and adolescents as well as literacy and post-literacy materials. Some other ambitions include doing picture books, having more of their books translated into other Indian languages, and starting a series of books by men on women.

All in all, Kali has enjoyed success in its 15 years of publishing, and that success has meant treading a fine line between the mainstream and the alternative.

While the mainstream finds our style of operation and non-profit emphasis unusual, even a bit eccentric, many activists feel that we are too 'commercial' or 'mainstream', not alternative enough. We often get flak from women because we don't publish everything that is offered to us. Our response is that everyone has the right to be selective, and if we feel we can't take something up as it is, we are willing to work with the author or group to help them publish it on their own. But we are also quite careful about not being open to the charge of publishing 'anything and everything', nor do we believe that this would necessarily serve the interests of alternative communication. But that begets the question: how alternative should, and can, alternative be? We can only say that we have found that we have

to negotiate the space between alternative and mainstream on a continuous basis, at practically every level, in order to both maintain our commitment and ensure viability and, in the end, be around long enough to make a difference.<sup>60</sup>

Butalia and Menon are optimistic they will still be around years from now and publishing more than ever. But even if they aren't, they have made a significant contribution to a cause they believe in that has undoubtedly educated and helped women the world over.

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<sup>60</sup> Butalia and Menon, "Feminist Publishing."

## 5.0 A New Publishing Format

### 5.1 The Decision

Kali for women already had a presence on the Web, albeit a small one, when Butalia and Menon received a proposal from a Master of Publishing student who wanted to establish a Web site for the company. The project would be the student's internship as per her programme's requirements. Kali was already profiled in one page on a site by a feminist publisher in Australia, Spinifex. The women at Kali knew this was not enough and had been thinking about how to start their own Kali site for some time. A lack of both the expertise and the computer equipment required to build a Web site held them back.

Butalia informed the student this could pose a problem.

I should warn you, if I have not already done so, that we at Kali are pretty backward about technology and you will find one barely functioning computer (a 486 at that!), no multimedia, no cd rom, nothing. We're hoping to modernise and upgrade in a couple of months time and if you are around at the time, that will be great, you can help us think technologically. For you, we'll be rather in the middle ages!<sup>61</sup>

The student agreed to bring her own portable computer and the software required. All she would need in the office was a scanner. Butalia promised to purchase one, as it was a piece of equipment they needed in the office anyway, and the plan to build a Web site for Kali was approved. The decision itself was not based on a formal SWOT analysis by the company, however it is still useful to use the format to take a closer look for the purposes of this study.

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<sup>61</sup> Urvashi Butalia in an e-mail to the author (September 3, 1998).

## **SWOT Analysis of building a Web site for Kali for Women**

### **Strengths**

- There is no charge for the Web site design, something that can cost a couple of thousand dollars US.
- The designer is bringing her own computer and software from Canada.
- The designer can work independently and will require minimal time out of Kali's daily schedule.
- The designer will be working in the Kali office so that her work can be observed.
- Kali for Women has been planning to use a Web site as a new kind of marketing and information tool for some time.
- Other feminist publishers are on the Web and Kali will join them.
- Kali will be able to compete with the sites of multinationals like Penguin and Scholastica. On the Web, all sites are equally accessible.
- A Web site brings Kali up to date with changes in publishing and communications that are occurring due to the creation and expansion of the Internet.
- A Web site is accessible to anyone with a computer and a modem across the country and around the world.
- Kali's entire catalogue will be online.
- A Web site does not use paper.
- A Web site costs less than a catalogue to publish.
- A Web site costs less than a catalogue to distribute, particularly in international postal rates.
- Accepting the proposal means strengthening a link with the Master of Publishing program in Vancouver, Canada.
- Accepting the proposal means providing a young woman with an opportunity for experience in Web design.

## **Weaknesses**

- Kali staff does not have the equipment nor the expertise to update the site after the designer returns to Canada.
- Much of Kali's target audience does not have access to the Internet.
- The Kali office itself does not have access to the Internet. It is a relatively unfamiliar medium.
- The technology to build and maintain a Web site is completely unknown to the staff at Kali.
- The designer does not have much experience in this field.
- The Kali office is cramped for space to accommodate another body.
- Kali will have to purchase a scanner for the site to be completed.

## **Opportunities**

- Kali could use the site for online ordering.
- Kali could use the site as a forum for new writers.
- Kali could use the site to receive reader feedback.
- Kali could use the site to network with other feminist organisations and publishers.
- Kali could increase its international exposure and reputation with the site.
- Kali could take advantage of the chance to learn about a new technology.
- The designer can update the site from Canada.

## **Threats**

- Kali may not have enough resources to deal with a flood of online orders.
- If the site does not look well-designed and professional, it could damage Kali's reputation.

- Kali could attract harassment from misogynist elements in the online world.
- It may be difficult to maintain a long distance relationship with the designer in Canada, once she returns.

## **5.2 The Result**

The Kali Web site's introduction page downloads in an unintentionally poetic manner.

The company logo is a pair of eyes with a sun and moon that take the place of a bindi on the brow above. Goddess Kali cannot wear a bindi, a symbol of marriage, because she has never taken a husband. The splash page's logo begins downloading at the top with the sun and gradually spreads downwards to reveal a red glowing version of Kali for Women's now well-known insignia. At the top in a separate frame is a navigation bar that contains a link to the site's four main areas: an information page about Kali, an online catalogue, a links page to other feminist publishers and organisations, and a contact page that includes a printable mail order form. Each section includes sidebars on the history of the women's movement in India in order to incorporate some information about Kali's feminist context. The site contains 67 pages in all; the largest segment is the online catalogue which contains 61 pages.

The site is targeted at two separate audiences. The primary goal is to use the site to reach Kali's readership in India, however, the rewards of this venture will take some time to develop. As mentioned, relatively few people have access to the Internet in India, but that number is rapidly expanding. The second audience is an international one—Kali will use the site to communicate with and make itself known to activists, publishers, and consumers in the rest of the world.



The online catalogue goes by the heading name "titles" and is a full version of the print catalogue in digital form, right down to the extensive stocklist that lists every title currently available from Kali for Women. The titles section subdivides into new, forthcoming, still available, reprints, Kali archive, monographs, backlist, and stocklist. Each of these sections displays a list of hyperlinked titles that the user can enter and move through using links at the top and bottom of each page. Where available, an image of the title's cover is displayed in the sidebar with a review. A graphic relevant to the book substitutes when this element is not available. The catalogue is the focus of the site and provides the most use to the company. The Kali catalogue is now cheaply available across the world—without using paper, without paying postage, and without depending on the mail system.

The remaining sections play important roles as well. "About" displays the company's mission statement and gives a very brief background of the site. "Links" contains links to other feminist publishers and organisations on the Web, such as ISIS International, Women's Ink, and the Toronto Women's Bookstore. The links page was considered an important element as much of Kali's success has depended upon networking within the women's movement. It only makes sense to carry that co-operation over to the Web. "Contact" provides Kali's postal address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address, and a link to a printable mail order form.

The size of the site is small considering that it contains 67 pages. This is mostly due to the fact that it uses only text and graphics, and modestly-sized graphics at that. The total memory the site requires is approximately 900 kilobytes, less than one megabyte and small enough to fit on a regular high density 3.5" floppy disk. Forty-nine percent of the memory is attributed to 67 HTML files and the remaining goes to 73 image

files, which are either JPEGs or GIFs. The site contains a total of 140 files. Coming up with the resultant Web site was a long process that took place over the course of four months. In order to understand it better, it is useful to study the events by analysing each category of activity separately: technical considerations, content considerations, and design and access considerations.

### **Technical considerations**

The first and foremost of the technical considerations was the availability of the hardware and software required to build a Web site. This concern was highlighted by Butalia from the start: Kali's office only has two computers and they are occupied by other business most of the day. Besides, those computers only have 486 processors, limited space on the hard drive, and are running on Windows 3.1—not sufficient to run the Web authoring software satisfactorily. The designer remedied this situation by bringing her own notebook computer from Canada, however even her equipment required updating. The notebook only had 8 MB of RAM and the software she would use required a minimum of 16 MB of RAM, so she upgraded her computer to 40 MB of RAM. Storage was also a concern. There was not much room on the notebook's hard drive and a 3.5" floppy was not the most desirable tool for backing up the anticipated large files required for a Web site. The designer purchased an Iomega Zip drive whose cartridges contain 100 MB of memory as compared to the 1.44 MB on a regular 3.5" disk.

The problems associated with hardware did not end there. The Indian power system runs on 220 volts whereas the equipment purchased in Canada was set for 110 volts. The plugs needed gender changers and the equipment required voltage converters. Luckily, the notebook already contained a converter for international conditions, but it still required surge protection. The power system in India is unreliable and blackouts and

brownouts occur a couple of times a week. The effect on a computer can be fatal, as the surge of power when it comes back can fry the mother board. Indeed, this is what most likely caused permanent damage to the Zip drive. Even though it was on a voltage converter and surge protector, the power cycles somehow killed it in early October.

Another major problem was lack of access to a scanner. Although the intention was to have a scanner in the office in early September, busy schedules and a number of out of town and country obligations by both Butalia and Menon prevented that from happening until mid-November. The cost of getting the scanning done at a service bureau was prohibitive—the price was 50 rupees per scan and a minimum of 50 scans would be required over the course of a couple of days. Nor did the Kali staff know of someone who owned a personal scanner that could be lent to the office or used by the designer at another location. The designer was still able to work on the site before the scanner appeared. She planned the site structure and design, input the text and also helped out with a small amount of editorial work in the office. But the scanner was required for the large bulk of work on the site—the graphic design—and as a result the building process was painstakingly slow until late in the internship.

The absence of a TCP/IP Internet connection, the link that allows browsers to view the Web, also caused some complications. Kali has e-mail, but it is a text-based system only. The language spoken by that type of connection is not the same as the one that translates the graphics, text, and layout in a Web page. The cost of a TCP/IP connection was extra and there was a waitlist to get it hooked up. This made research on other publishers' sites and other sites in general very difficult. One solution was to visit a communications centre only a few blocks away. They offered Web browsing for a cost of 130 rupees per hour. The drawback was that their connection was very slow, probably in

order to earn more money, and the pressure to look hastily was strong.

Access to a server wasn't as prohibitive. Kali followed the trend of most Indian Web sites and got the site served out of the United States. Kali had two different options as to who would host the site. The first offer came from a colleague of Menon's who owns space on a server in Chicago. He was willing to host the Kali site for roughly US\$100 per year, about half the regular price, and take care of the registration of a domain name for US\$70. A second choice came later when a colleague of Butalia's in California said he would host the site for free. This was the option Kali chose. The contact in California, a man by the name of Anil Srivastava, also took care of the cost of registration, saying that Kali could do a favour for him in the future. Butalia was aware of Srivastava's possible motives; Srivastava is with a communications company in the US. He wants to build a number of India-focussed sites on the Web, including Bookindia.com, a resource for Indian publications. He is hoping to get Butalia's help in this.

In retrospect, it may have been wiser to choose the paying option. While US\$170 is a saving for Kali, the service provided by the free server is somewhat unsatisfactory. Srivastava is slow to make changes to the site, such as registering and putting into operation the domain name. This still hadn't occurred more than a month after the site first appeared on the Web and that stalls the site's marketing plans—you cannot advertise a Web address until it actually exists. And why should he place a priority on this work when he is not receiving immediate benefit? Another concern is what will become of the site if Kali is not able to provide all of the resources that Srivastava demands in exchange for his services. As these weren't clarified from the start, it is difficult to know exactly what he will ask for. More time will have to pass before any concrete conclusions can be drawn about both of these matters.

## **Content considerations**

The range of what Kali could have included on the Web site was wide. The site could have been no more than an electronic brochure containing a brief description of the company and its contact information to a full-fledged electronic women's publishing house with forums for new writers, opportunities for consumers to send in and post reviews, and online ordering of titles complete with encryption for the secure transmission of credit card numbers. Kali's choice, naturally, fell somewhere in between these two extremes. The former would just be an improved duplication of what was already on the Spinifex site. The resources to take on the latter simply were not available to Kali.

Kali's site conforms to what most publishers are doing on the Web—using the Internet to publish an online catalogue and other marketing tools. Kali's current catalogue is small enough to make for a comprehensive online version without having to build a search engine for the site, something that would've required knowledge in CGI scripting. Transferring the catalogue to digital form presented some organisational challenges. The first was how to organise the titles and categorize them. In the catalogue, they are jumbled up and interspersed throughout depending upon the profile of the book. In a non-linear environment, they had to be grouped together under a new system. This was accomplished by first taking consumers to a list of the sub-categories—new, forthcoming, backlist, etc.—and after clicking on a sub-category, linking individual titles so that the users can move backwards and forwards through individual pages using links to the previous and the next titles in the loop.

The decision was made not to opt for online ordering at this time. The first reason was that there is no way to judge in advance how many hits the Web site will get and how many direct orders that could generate. Kali does not have the staff to deal with a possible

flood of individual orders to the office, nor did Butalia want to deal with using credit card numbers for the purchases, the only way for a customer to pay online. Credit cards also require encrypted coding in the site, otherwise the information that is being transmitted over the Web can be intercepted and read by anyone who is linked to the network.

Still, it seemed that the Web site would lose impact if there was absolutely no way for the users to order titles. What is the point of seeing a description of a Kali title if you are in the US and the book is not available in your local bookstore? The remedy was something that many small publishing houses are using on the Web: a printable mail order form. The form is exactly the same as the one that appears in Kali's print catalogue; the customer must include a cheque in rupees payable in New Delhi. While it does ensure that only truly interested inquiries will be made, the trouble that a potential customer will have to endure to get a draft cheque payable in rupees could discourage the sale. In addition, the postal system in India is not 100 per cent reliable. Mail from outside the country has to be sent double-registered for any amount of assurance that it will reach its destination.

There is a better solution on the horizon. Kali is considering a partnership with Rediff.com, an Indian site, to sell their books from its online shopping section.

### **Design and access considerations**

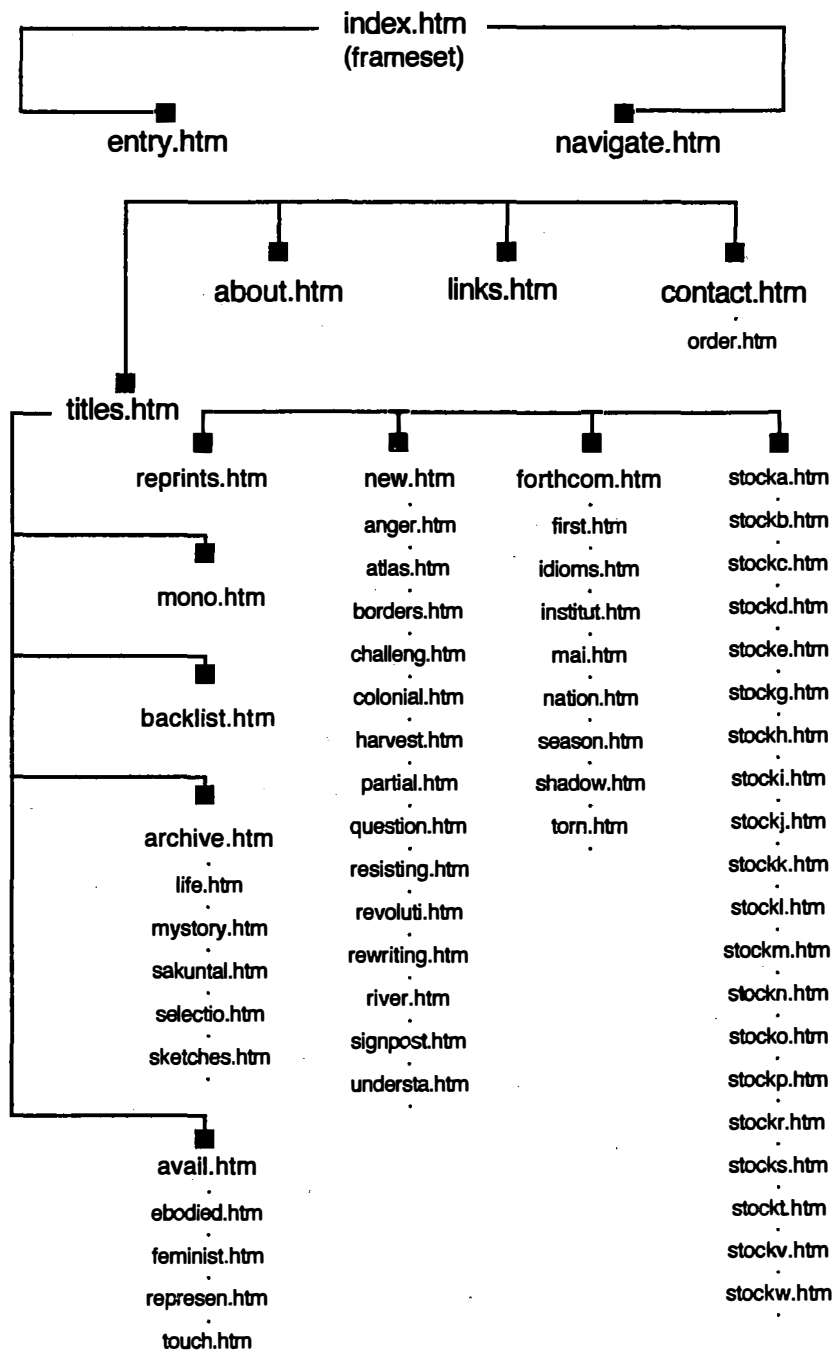
The prime consideration in Kali's site design was to keep the file sizes to the bare minimum. Most of the people in Kali's target audience will be accessing the site with slower computers or someone else's slower computers. People with the latest in technology do not form the bulk of Kali's readership and international audience. Large graphics and animations are nice, but if it takes forever to download, who will be around to enjoy them? This was accomplished by trying to spare the pages of too many graphics and making sure that the graphics that are present are of a modest size. No single

graphic is larger than 20K and no single page is larger than 50K. The major triumph came when the site weighed in at less than 1 MB—very small for a Web site.

A concern that was adjunct to this was whether to use frames or not. A frame is like a separate Web page within a larger page and is often used to carry a constantly present navigation bar that users can always fall back on if they get 'lost'. Because of the numerous levels contained in the catalogue, the navigation bar was a desirable element. The problem was that older browsers on older computers cannot read frames. The solution was to have the site automatically bounce to a 'no frames message' that gives alternative viewing instructions whenever it encounters an older browser and to make the site completely navigable using text-based links. This also comes in handy for users who shut off their graphics in order to decrease download time.

The next question was to decide upon what inherent message the Web site should carry about the company. The final design incorporates the assertiveness of the women's movement with its historical elements in India. One of Kali's titles, *A History of Doing* by Radha Kumar, has powerful images from different events in women's history in India over the past century. The images were interwoven in the Web site in a red side bar. They depict women in positions of power and unity. For example, one shows a woman holding a photo of her murdered daughter, allegedly for dowry, in a protest against such crimes. Another is the scene of a group of women rallying against the allegedly forced sati (widow immolation) of a young widow in Rajasthan in 1987. The images are not in isolation—each carries a brief description below it. Using the combination of red, black, and white that is in Kali's logo, the site reflects the strength of both the company and the women's movement in India. The following diagram reflects as accurately as possible the site's final structure on paper.

Figure 1. Site Map for www.kallbooks.com (January 13, 1999)





## 6.0 The Way from Here

### 6.1 Marketing the Site

The marketing plan is two-pronged: the designer will take care of online marketing in Canada once the domain name is up and running. Butalia and Menon will take care of offline marketing in India.

#### Online

Register with major search engines and Web directories:

- Utilise [www.submit-it.com](http://www.submit-it.com): This is a free service that submits your site to about twenty search tools of your choice (chosen from their list).
- Personally register Kali's site with [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com), [altavista.digital.com](http://altavista.digital.com), [www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com), [www.webcrawler.com](http://www.webcrawler.com), [www.infoseek.com](http://www.infoseek.com), and [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com). These are the best known search engines and directories.
- Search for and register with any search tools that are specific to feminism, Third World issues, or publishing. To find a list of such directories use [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com): World Wide Web: How to Search the Web: Search Engines or Directories: [www.beaucoup.com](http://www.beaucoup.com) and [www.search.com](http://www.search.com).
- Register with [www.2020tech.com/submit.html](http://www.2020tech.com/submit.html). This place lists sites that distribute your URL to other sites, reciprocal link services, regional directories, sites that list your URL for free, and "Other pages like this one".
- Search in [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com): World Wide Web: Announcement Services: How to Announce and Promote Your Site for further suggestions.

Get other sites to link to the Kali site:

- Find Web pages that are lists of links pertaining to feminism, Third World issues, Asia-Pacific, or publishing and e-mail them to let them know of Kali's presence on the Web.
- E-mail the organisations included on the links page to let them know about the site and that the Kali site has linked to them. Ask each for a link to the Kali site.

- Notify any other similar organisations on the Web about the site. Offer to link to them in exchange for a link to Kali.

## **Offline**

Make the address a part of promotional material:

- Start including the Web address in letterhead, brochures, and the diary.
- Print the Web address with the rest of Kali's address information in any publications.
- Make the Web address a part of print ads and any other advertising.

Send out a press release:

- Let the trade publications know of the site's existence.
- Send a press release to the usual publications that get review copies from Kali.

Tell people about it:

- Send a rejig of the press release to Kali's bookstores and buyers.
- Also send the release to publishing and cultural organisations affiliated with Kali.
- Talk about the site to as many other people as possible, especially publishers and activists. Networking happens fast on the World Wide Web.

## **6.2 Web Site Work is Never Done**

The original vision for maintaining and updating the site intended the designer to pass on the expertise to one person at Kali who could in turn share it with others. Kali was supposed to upgrade its computer equipment at some point during the internship, which would have made it possible to have equipment in the office suitable for design purposes. This, however, did not happen in time. In addition, the task of completing the Web site itself within the internship's time frame became a concern because of the late arrival of a

scanner. These are understandable circumstances, particularly in such a small company that is doing so much with so few people. However, the result was that there wasn't enough time left to handle the scope of teaching Web design to people completely unfamiliar with the technology.

But there is always a solution when one thinks hard enough, and in this case it was not too difficult to find one: the designer volunteered to update the site from Canada. Before leaving India she instructed two of Kali's staff members, Butalia and Jaya Banerji, the part-time editor, on how to scan images and e-mail files needed for the Web site. The designer will make the necessary changes in Canada and then send the updated files to the server in the US. That just goes to show how the Web truly can transcend national boundaries. This system will be fine for at least one year. After that, if the designer cannot continue, or Kali does not desire the designer's services any longer, the company may have to turn to a Web designer in India or elsewhere.

### **6.3 Future Possibilities**

Kali's Web site is similar in structure and content to those of other publishers of similar size on the Web. But Kali for Women has a legacy of being an innovative company and, if the Web site proves successful, could undoubtedly come up with some new ways to use the Web within the women's publishing scene. One possibility is to create a forum for new writings by women in India, including translations from local languages. Every week or two weeks, a short story or novel excerpt could be featured. This would help to increase the exposure of women writers from India on an international basis.

Another potential element is a section for readers to submit and post reviews. Amazon.com already does this and includes negative reviews so that they cannot be

accused of censorship. Given the breadth and scope of Kali's titles, this could lead to interesting debates on women's issues in India and around the world. Perhaps it could even lead to a chat salon where feminists could gather to discuss current events in real time.

Given Kali's activist history, perhaps another use for the Web site could be as a resource for women's organisations in India. Each year the Kali diary contains such a list, why not move it over to the Web? Kali could also provide information on domestic violence, property rights, and legal aid as it has done with its primers. This section could also set aside a page to highlight a current campaign or movement, an alternative to distributing pamphlets and posters.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Goddess Kali symbolizes power and this is demonstrated through her destructive capabilities. She is often depicted as black and terrible with a mane of flowing hair and a necklace of heads. But through Kali's destruction comes rebirth and new forms of existence; this transformation cannot occur without shedding the former incarnations. And so it is that Kali for Women is adapting to changes in communications and publishing by starting its first experiment in the online world. The irrevocable and unstoppable change of atoms into bits—traditional media into electronic data—as described by Nicholas Negroponte is a force that cannot be ignored. The sooner one becomes familiar with the new forms of communication, the sooner one can make a contribution to that realm.

Publishing in the Third World, particularly in India, is just starting to gain a stable existence in the post-colonial era. As publishers in the South increase their strength, they can begin to compete with the presence of publishers from the West and reverse the flow of information from the developed world. But neglecting to grasp the new form of electronic communication threatens to chip away at that progress. This could be particularly so for feminist publishing, which is a new domain pioneered by Kali. Keeping up a presence in cyberspace means that Kali is on a par with both feminist and mainstream publishers who also have Web sites. The Internet may only reach a small portion of India's citizens, but it reaches the educated portion who have money and influence on the rest of society. Kali is preparing itself for future and possibly radical changes in publishing in the years to come. At the same time, it can continue to use traditional means to reach its existing demographic.

Of course, one has to ask, "Was Kali itself ready to adopt the new technology and publishing format?" There were technical obstacles that had to be overcome and there will undoubtedly be more in the future. But Kali has a history of risk-taking and experimentation. If Butalia and Menon had doted on the challenges facing them 15 years ago, they would have never led the way to developing feminist publishing in India and South Asia. In other words, one has to start somewhere. While technological change is occurring exponentially more quickly than ever, sometimes those who are used to the status quo are slow to accept those changes. That is not to say that the ploughing ahead of technology should be accepted without question. But one must have knowledge in the field in order to challenge its progress and not be swept away in the current. Kali for Women has taken a step in that direction and can incorporate exposure to and debate upon women's issues in India and South Asia into the incomprehensible mass of millions of interconnected computers that constitutes the Internet.

Kali for Women does not have to start publishing electronic books tomorrow. Nor does it have to incorporate multimedia's animation and sound into its Web site right away. Those formats will come when the company is ready for them. Starting with a simple text and graphics Web site that displays the company's catalogue keeps Kali in step with what most other publishers are doing on the Web and says to the world that the company is ready to accept and adopt any future challenges that stand in the way of maintaining its purpose and mission.

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